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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH KREMLIN ADVISOR  
YASTRZHEMSKIY

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns, for reasons 1.4 (B & D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Ambassador met April 25 with Sergey Yastrzhembskiy, President Putin's Special Representative for Issues of Development of Relations with the European Union. Yastrzhembskiy said preparations for the EU-Russia summit in Sochi in late May were going well, and identified several agreements that would be signed. He discussed at some length his dissatisfaction with Russia's inability to project a favorable image abroad of its activities, noting its failure to do so in the "gas war" with Ukraine, with the controversial NGO law now going into effect, and on the Northern European gas pipeline project. Asked about how the U.S. might best be able to provide useful assistance to people in the North Caucasus, Yastrzhembskiy recommended continuing to work closely with Presidential Representative Dmitriy Kozak to identify needs that were not being filled, and to provide concrete assistance first and only then to talk publicly about it. End Summary.

#### The Sochi Summit

¶2. (C) Yastrzhembskiy said preparations for the Russia-EU Summit in Sochi on May 25 were "going well" despite a few problems and reflected a "very positive trend" in overall Russia-EU relations. He expected at least two agreements, one facilitating visa arrangements between Russia and Schengen Agreement countries and the other concerning readmission to Russia of people who had transited it en route to the EU. "Perhaps some of our 'siloviki' may not be happy" with the readmission agreement, Yastrzhembskiy said, but President Putin's personal support for the agreement had overridden their objections. The agreement's relatively short (two-year) phase-in period was a "very good stick" to force action from "lazy bureaucrats," and better border-management arrangements with countries like Kazakhstan and China would be a benefit.

¶3. (C) While less certain than the first two agreements, negotiations had also been completed for a new TASIS agreement, and there were "no political objections" to it. However, there was "ideologically one point of disagreement" that Yastrzhembskiy did not identify, but said there was adequate time left to resolve it. There also would be the launch of a "Europa college" affiliated with existing Russian institutions of higher education and co-financed equally by the EU and Russian sides. It had already sparked huge interest from many young people working in Russian governmental institutions.

¶4. (C) In addition to those concrete results, there would be discussion at the Sochi summit of a range of political issues: Iran, the Middle East (Hamas), perhaps implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, probably Belarus and other issues of the post-Soviet space, Russian-EU

disagreements about trans-Siberian airline flights, and the EU-Russia energy charter.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador noted that the Sochi summit would also play an important role in setting the atmosphere for the St. Petersburg G-8 summit in July. Yastrzhembskiy agreed.

#### Polishing Russia's Image

¶6. (C) Noting that Yastrzhembskiy had at one time been Russia's Presidential Spokesman and also dealt for several years with public information aspects of the Chechnya conflict for the Presidential Administration, the Ambassador asked him for his thoughts on recent GOR attempts to improve Russia's image internationally and to deal with issues such as the "gas war" with Ukraine and the controversy surrounding the NGO law. Yastrzhembskiy said Russia's PR efforts had been a "big headache" because they had not been very successful. He had closely studied USG experience in, e.g., Operation Desert Storm and had concluded that while the U.S. was much more sophisticated than Russia in this area, even the U.S. had been able to show very modest results for the substantial resources it had expended. When he had worked under President Yeltsin, trying to improve Russia's image abroad had been almost hopeless. It was like "sitting on top of a volcano," with a weak state, huge budget problems, and the various branches of government feuding among themselves.

¶7. (C) In Soviet times, Yastrzhembskiy continued, there had been many institutions designed to affect international public opinion, but they were "just very aggressive and not very smart." In post-Soviet Russia those institutions had been largely destroyed, but nothing had been created to replace them. Some "islands" of the Soviet period (like

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RIA-Novosti, and ITAR-TASS) still existed, but they were not effective. There was a need for a new system that would not be focused on one-day or one-month campaigns, but that would work instead on the basis of a ten-year strategy, with sufficient funding. Now there was no system and no coordination.

¶8. (C) Yastrzhembskiy cited the adoption of the NGO law as one example of how the Russian system did not work effectively. There had been no sense in taking the draft NGO law to the Council of Europe only after it had become an international public issue; Russia should have gone to the COE first, which would have put in a better position to disarm the critics. The "gas war" with Ukraine had also been mishandled publicly by Gazprom, and the same was true of the Northern European gas pipeline project. Public support for that effort should have been launched earlier, and now it had to be done "after the fact." Part of the problem had been the need to work with a German government that first was tied up in an election campaign and then in lengthy cabinet formation. Schroeder was now talking about the need to worry about Russia's image abroad in this connection, but he should have thought of that from the beginning. The problem was not just with Gazprom, but also with the Russian state.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador said the GOR could still take helpful steps on the new NGO law, if the MFA, Ministry of Justice and other relevant bodies were to pro-actively call NGOs and the media together to explain in detail how the registration process would unfold and where people could turn for answers to their questions. Similarly, President Putin could use his "Poslaniye" (state of the nation address, now expected to be delivered at some time in May) to be clearer about his long-term plans for Russia's political and economic modernization and to speak out on the issue of xenophobia and the unacceptability of attacks on ethnic or religious minorities in Russia. To the degree that Putin could communicate a vision of a long-term Russian strategy showing how it planned to realize common G-8 values in the Russian

context, that could help the St. Petersburg summit be a success, as President Bush had made clear he wanted.

¶10. (C) Yastrzhembskiy agreed in principle but said many in Russia had concluded that "criticism of Russia is a permanent process." The level of skepticism about the good will of the West was "so high, even on the President's team," that it was hard to get consideration of proposed steps in a more open direction. He would consider the possibilities, however, and see if there were three or four points that he could propose.

North Caucasus  
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¶11. (C) The Ambassador asked whether Yastrzhembskiy could suggest a strategy by which U.S. efforts to provide concrete help to people in the North Caucasus could be favorably considered by the GOR. Yastrzhembskiy laid out several steps to that end. First, he said, forget about focusing on things like the provision of food or tents; the time for that kind of assistance had passed. Second, continue to work with Presidential Representative for the Southern Region Dmitriy Kozak and his deputy Pochinok. Kozak was "very sensible" (even compared with federal officials in Moscow, because he was "on the ground") and "a good ally." The U.S. should work with him to identify spheres in which there were unmet public needs (he cited the example of providing internet facilities to school and university libraries). What the U.S. should avoid was the mistake that the EU had made: it had talked for two years about help it was going to provide, but during that time implemented nothing. The U.S. should first provide help and only then start talking about what it had done. The Ambassador said he would follow up again with Kozak to further explore how the U.S. might be helpful. After the meeting concluded, Yastrzhembskiy's assistant Aleksandr Machevskiy suggested deferring a further conversation with Kozak until mid-May, to let the negative reaction in Moscow to the recent Jamestown Foundation seminar on the North Caucasus blow over.

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